

NEWS IN BRIEF

Wednesday 11th February 2009

Dates for your diary

Wednesday 4th March – Kindergarten Parents evening

Saturday 7th March – Open day at the school, 11am-3pm.

Tuesday 10th March – Open Steering group meeting

Saturday 21st March – School Governance workshop

An update from the kindergartens

King Winter has sat proudly in his throne this year, with Jack Frost and Sister Snow working loyally at his side! In Chestnut, we have celebrated the gifts they bring in many ways; we have made beautiful snowflakes with icy coloured wool to decorate our room, we've heard stories about Jack Frost's home in the very last village before the North Pole, and great fun has been had building snowmen outside and stamping on icy puddles. To keep warm we have been drinking hot apple juice (sometimes outside for a treat) and making sure we are always well wrapped up.

Over the past week we have celebrated Candlemas. This festival marks forty days since Christmas, and the end of the darkest days of winter (which began with Martinmas in November). A spark of hope that the joys of spring are not so far off is kindled. The celebrations have mainly taken place outside, with the lighting of an earth candle each day (which was beautifully decorated in a spiral of twigs, stones, leaves and snowballs!) and singing songs to help Mother Earth warm the ground and gently wake the seed babies.

The children's play continues to be as imaginative as ever, with themes such as creating and visiting the seaside, mining for treasure, pretending to be fish in fish tanks, and setting up and performing puppet plays. Their social skills are developing very well through their play, and as a group they show an ever increasing respect for each others needs and ideas.

Both Maple and Chestnut have enjoyed visiting each other for story time on occasions this term, and will be joining together on the last two days before half term to watch a puppet play performed by teachers from both groups.

Finally, the sun children (oldest group) are now getting more involved with projects especially for them. They are busy with their weaving, making folders for their paintings, and will be soon beginning some woodwork. They also take turns helping the teachers serve snack and clear up afterwards, and have the privilege of sometimes visiting or inviting Maple sun children for story time.

We wish you all a happy and restful half term.

Practical Skills

By Mr Charles

The 9th Year Threshold – the child moves from oneness to separateness – giving rise to a feeling of insecurity. With this feeling of being alone in the world, we help the children by exploring the building of a dwelling or shelter – one of Mans basic needs.

We find out from the children what they know about simple dwellings from around the world and share stories about what sort of materials might have been used. We talk about why people chose these materials and discover that they are found within the local environment. So the mud hut is one of the human beings most primitive dwellings made with his hands and from materials derived from the Earth.

We set about making our own 'Cob' mixture from some straw (left over from an earlier farming block, where we followed and carried out some of the processes, from harvest to baking bread) and some mud with a high content of clay. Each child had a board which they applied some mud to, to set the scene or foundation upon which, to build a dwelling belonging to a small village. We imagined that these mud huts might have belonged to peoples of Africa, who lived in the grasslands. They may have used branches and twigs, plastered with red mud for their 'cob' and the grasses to thatch their roofs. They would have been herdsmen, often sending the children to drive out the cattle to pasture and a nearby water hole. At the end of the day the herd would return to the 'Fold'.

Open Day – Saturday 7th March 11am-3pm

All parents and their extended families and friends are warmly invited, encouraged even, to come along to the next School, Kindergarten and Parent & Child Groups Open Day. The last one, held in November, was a huge success and had a wonderful atmosphere. We welcomed lots of new visitors as well as existing families.

The Publicity and Events Team, which supports the school staff at Open Days, is appealing for anyone who would like to get involved in the running of the day to put their name forward. There will be a rota in the main school reception from Monday 23rd February. Alternatively you can contact any of the named team members below or email us at publicity@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk. Helping out at these publicity events is a great way to contribute to the success of the school and as usual we will be approaching parents personally in the next couple of weeks to look for volunteer bakers (you all did such a great job last time!).

Jobs on the day include:

Set up (Charlotte)

Friday evening from 7pm and Saturday morning from 9am

Decorate the school and move furniture

Flower and foliage arranging

Put up signs and blackboards with info and directions

Set up cafe and book/craft stall

Cleaning and tidying

Book and craft stall (Heidi)

Saturday 10.45am to 4.00pm in hour or two hour slots

Looking after displays and serving customers

Cafe (Victoria)

Saturday 10.45am to 4.00pm in hour or two hour slots

Serving drinks and refreshments

Clearing tables and tidying

Washing up

Clear up at end of day

Playground/outdoor monitors

Saturday from 11am to 3pm in half hour or hour slots

Watch and if necessary supervise children in the playground

Clearing up

From 3pm Saturday – an hour or so

To restore the school to its usual beauty, ready for lessons and groups on Monday morning.

Please do let us know if you feel you can help in any way. There is usually a core of people who work at these events and we would love to see some new faces. There is much wisdom in the expression “Many hands make light work”!

Nappacino

Brigid Hayward and Heidi Longhurst will be taking a Steiner Education information stall to Nappacino once a month – every 2nd Thursday. It is a cloth nappy publicising coffee morning and a wonderful opportunity to meet and chat with other parents. Do pop along and visit or support them, it runs from 11am – 1pm at St Albans Hall, Grove Road.

Games, play, gymnastics and sport in a Steiner Waldorf School

A talk by Martin Baker at Norwich Steiner School 29th January 2009 Written up by Peter Reeve, Wroxham Steiner School

“Movement is a profound activity, but we are largely unconscious of it,” said Martin, initially walking across the platform, stooping and repeating his entrance, looking confident and erect. Posture, he said, is all-important. “Straightness is synonymous with truth – and like truth has a moral quality. It coincides with straightness.” To be straight, he suggested, is honest and upright. “There is strength to the human being erect and straight, in not leaning or putting one’s head to one side. Exercise not only cleans the arteries and veins; exercises the lungs and tones the muscles, but also benefits our emotional life and well-being” Martin then referred to personal space, taking concepts from Bothmer gymnastics in relation to space taken by the human being. “We start life inside our mother. A young child young he/she shares his mother’s personal space. As we grow and reach the age of nine, we begin to stand apart from our parent and teacher, this drawing away process gradually continuing.”

“By the age of 13 the sense of detachment from our parents tends to be more marked. In a way this is where we begin our own individual life”. Martin demonstrated this with a person: in greeting, first shaking hands normally, then coming too close or standing apart. “If we come too close to another person, face to face, this may be uncomfortable or threatening; if we stand back from someone this may be interpreted as being detached.” Martin went on to draw attention to what is above, exists in the far spaces above, and that in the earth below. and the need for a sense of balance. As well as referring to

erectness, not inclining to one side or the other, he spoke of a balance between moving forward or backward, as in were in time, standing still in the present.

“This development of spatial awareness is echoed in the Steiner school curriculum,” continued Martin: “7-year-olds like symmetry and balance, left and right, and in reaching up and down, referring at this point to Rudolf Steiner. Time, too, is perceived in terms of movement forward and backward. There are exercises for children in moving forwards, backwards and standing still, and exercises for moving laterally and in reaching up or crouching down. “In Class 2 and 3 we introduce concepts of time; we look at candle clocks, sundials and egg timers. At puberty, by contrast, there is little equanimity; they tend to swing up and down in their emotions.” Martin contrasted the young child who lives in his mother’s personal space, with 9-year-olds who have moved apart, and with 13-year-olds who are beginning to develop their own individuality. Summarising, he referred to erectness, straightness, balance and poise.

“Usually in school, children are taught to emulate adult activities of many kinds – such as in sport, ballet and many other activities. In Steiner schools, though, we do child-centred activities of many kinds with the children. We engage in movement that suits their stage in development, contributing to their erectness, poise and balance.” It is sometimes assumed, said Martin, that in Steiner schools that we do not favour competition. “Yet children do enjoy competing with each other in all sorts of movement activities. We do this by playing games – though we do not start sport until puberty sets in. At Michael Hall School we then do a lot of basket ball. True this is competitive, but not in a marked or aggressive way.” It’s an activity that requires a continual sense of space, vertical, lateral, forward and backward, in relation to others. “Competition is actually good in the right place. The pupils engage in basket ball, playing very keenly.”

“With younger children, we very often tell a story and set the scene – they then have a reason to play the game. The contrast in school might otherwise be ‘When I blow a whistle, you do this or that’ - to order. That’s wrong,” Martin said. “We play games with children using imagination - half in the dream world, half in the real world. You can all throw the television away. Older pupils, 17-year-olds need to develop their strength - in rough and tumble – in a “reasonable way”. We have uniforms for PE at Michael Hall, Martin said, adding that at first he had some reservations about this, but we have found that pupils are proud of them of their PE kit.

“Dance as in ballet is too adult and stylised; neither do we push children to learn to swim.” As adults we may go in the pool and allow the children to copy us, but we let them take their time. Many games are played indoors, but some are played outside in the playground. “Sport,” Martin said “is traditional combat”. Much of organised ‘sport’, he asserted, is not really sport, but often promoted to make money for somebody. Packer, in Australia, he said, wants to take over all test cricket and make it more popular and make money out of it. Business is taking over sport, when it should be “a loving human activity”.

To the question: “Is there a book on games” Martin recommended the book ‘Games Children play,’ to which he had himself contributed. He said he knew about 150 games. He said that every child at Michael Hall regularly has 1½ hours of games a week. He also mentioned that parents could go down to the park together at weekends and school holidays and play games with their children. Martin said: Remember, when children are young we start with a picture. “From a group image we move over to individual image. From group space we move towards individual space. We move with little children leading from story over into action.” In fact, Martin said, in Steiner schools we can be “more prescriptive” than state education very often is. There is no reason for a reputation we might have for “looseness” as we are not slack. Even at games, we really engage.

To a question on the difference between eurhythmy and games, Martin said that eurhythmy is an art of movement, whereas games are more like a science of movement, with its own rules and laws. He then called on 12 volunteers to play a game ‘Cat and Mouse’- each pair as a ‘Magic House’. Pairs stood in Magic Houses somewhere on the platform, and there was also a ‘cat’ and a ‘mouse’. The cat chases the mouse, but the mouse can seek refuge in a Magic House. Those in the Magic House have one arm linked to the arm of the other person there. But when the mouse joins and links an arm, the person on the other side is freed to leave. At that very moment he/she then turns into a cat – and the former cat becomes a mouse. This cycle continues on and on.

We play many ‘tag’ games which are to do with chasing – which children adore. Another such game is “I sent a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it.” This game is traditionally played with the children singing the words and even clapping. The child holding the letter skips around a circle of seated children and drops it behind one child, who then gives chase, running after him to catch him before he reaches the vacant space. Another game Martin demonstrated is ‘Red and Greens’, in which there are two lines of

children, one behind the other facing the front, one file being Reds and the other Greens. The teacher tells a colourful and imaginative story in which, as the story gets going, mentions the word 'red' or green' as part of the story. The children have to be alert to notice and the Reds chase the Greens to the side of the room or vice versa.

Martin added that skipping as a child activity was very under-rated, being a "wonderful coordinator", and he went on also to mention hop-scotch and clapping games, traditional children's games, which children just engage in of themselves. He demonstrated a 'thumb game', whereby the thumbs of two children count up to 10, wagging from side to side, 'bow' to each other, and then attack! He said children do not need to, should not, as in football, direct their attention down to their feet, in order to kick a ball, for this releases forces from the ground upwards, as is shown in aggression. Even football crowds often demonstrate aggression.

He also demonstrated a tussling game (Indian wrestling) for teenagers in which they hold each other by the hand and endeavour to pull the other from their stance on the ground with two feet, arm twisting and jerking allowed. This displays strength and acumen, yet with but limited aggression.

Another game Martin showed was with a loop of string called 'Cat in the Hole', requiring dexterity and sleight of hand. Martin said it had been found by researchers that the same part of the brain was used, moving one's fingers as in thinking. He reflected that everything made by mankind is made with or as a result of someone's hands and he emphasised how important our hands are. Our heads, though, need to remain at rest, cool and reflective; whilst our legs carry us where we wish to go. He was not in favour of karate which cultivates a certain hardness and aggression.

Comment by Peter Reeve: It may be pointed out that though the games Martin Baker mentioned were for groups of children and by implication social, he did not actually specify their value in this respect, though surely he knew this and well might have mentioned it. That is, games are not just for individual and personal development, but also teach children how to follow the rules, take their turn, act fairly and lose gracefully. He himself moved with a great deal of conscious bodily control, with clear speaking, able, with the children, to join in the "fun" of playing games. He repeated that "we have fun in our games lessons." Martin has made games, play, and gymnastics and sport his life.

Work on the building & outside

Priority tasks for which help is needed include:

- Redecorating the next classroom – our target is to finish this by Easter to allow for the possibility of splitting the combined class 1/2/3 should we successfully appoint a new teacher by that time.
- Redecorating another small room adjacent to the girls' toilets so that we have separate changing facilities for girls and boys.
- Painting the remainder of the upstairs corridor
- Preparing the ground in the high fence field for planting beech saplings to fill in the gaps in the existing hedge. This is an urgent task needing to be carried out before the warmer weather. If parents could prepare the ground over the next couple of weeks, it's possible that the children in the school and kindergarten could plant the saplings.

If you can help, please phone Sandie (home) 01603 503795 or at the school during term time. Or email sandie.tolhurst@tiscali.co.uk

Visitors to the school

Janet Parsons is a Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) early years advisor, and a couple of weeks ago she spent two days in the kindergartens, providing mentoring support for our kindergarten teachers. Her visit was much appreciated by all and she has offered to return next term, so we will soon be seeing her again!

Kevin Avison from the SWSF has also recently visited; Kevin advises and provides a form of 'quality control' to new schools. As a sponsored school, we are obliged to have these visits at least twice a year and they are part of a 12 year (minimum) process towards becoming a full member Steiner School. During this most recent visit, Kevin also conducted a thought-provoking and helpful workshop on creative discipline in Steiner Schools; although this workshop was specifically for staff, Kevin has offered to repeat the workshop for parents, should there be the interest.

Ann Swain is from Michael Hall Steiner school and is visiting the School & Kindertartens on 23rd & 24th February to observe all the children and advise staff on any special learning needs. Ann will also be helping us to revise our admissions policies